

THURSDAY,
JANUARY 14, 2010
SECTION E

home & garden



KEEPING UP WITH THE UZELACS

WHILE DESIGNING THEIR NEW HOME, THIS COUPLE FAVORS GREEN

BY ERIKA ROSE
Times Correspondent

After buying some land in St. John in 2006 on which they planned to build their dream home, Nenad and Biljana Uzelac were talking to a friend who had also bought a parcel on which to build.

The friend asked about geothermal heating, noting it was part of the "green movement" to which Nenad, an electrical engineer, responded, "What is the green movement?"

"I thought maybe it would mean an energy efficient heater," Nenad says. "I didn't really know what it meant. A few bookshelves later, I had a pretty good understanding of what it is."

A few feet from one of those bookshelves, with his wife Biljana, a pediatrician, and their 4-year-old son Kosta playing nearby, Nenad explains the resulting "engineering challenge" he embarked on when he decided to join the eco-friendly club.

As defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "green buildings are designed to reduce the overall impact of the built environment on human health and the natural environment by: efficiently using energy, water, and other resources; protecting occupant health and improving employee productivity; and reducing waste, pollution and environmental degradation."

Most importantly, Nenad learned the values of green are in line with their personal values, ones that living in the U.S., they concede, they'd compromised a bit.

Natives of Serbia, the Uzelacs admit they'd grown accustomed to the abundance of the American lifestyle and have been guilty of some wastefulness in the 10 years they've lived in the U.S. Biljana joked about her family's

astonishment about her long showers when she returns home to her native land.

That's all about to change. When they move into their new home, which is expected by summer's end, they will be able to say their footprint on Mother Earth is much gentler than that of most folks.

After hundreds of e-mails and phone calls over about eight months, architect Debra Coleman from Sun Plans, Inc. provided plans that elated the couple, custom-designed for their lifestyle. Then, they went looking for a builder that has a reputation for meeting green standards. They chose Cook Builders in Crown Point.

Nenad plans to put some teeth behind his claim, as he is striving to earn a top nod from a green building rating program, such as the National Green Building Standard from the National Association for Home Builders (NAHB), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) from the Green Building Council or Energy Star, awarded by the EPA. In fact, he scours the standards from these programs, looking for more ways to green up the plans he discusses with his builder.

Here are a few ways in which the Uzelacs are greening up their act.

SMALLER, AND BETTER

One of the most obvious ways to minimize a home's impact on the Earth is to build it as small as possible. The Uzelac homestead will be 2,601 square feet, just one square foot more than the subdivision's minimum standard. His engineering background to aid him, Nenad scrutinizes the materials the builder orders and makes sure the design is as maintenance-free as possible as



TONY V. MARTIN PHOTOS | THE TIMES

TOP: Nenad Uzelac and his wife, Biljana, and their son, Kosta, 4, show off the computer model of their new home. The model shows the passive solar system of southern exposure windows on the home. The Uzelac family focused their concern for the environment into the design. The St. John home will be one of the first completely green homes in Northwest Indiana.

ABOVE: In their current home Nenad uses a computer-controlled lighting system that he can control with his cellphone from anywhere. The remote control system allows more ecologically sound use of energy resources.

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SUGAR-SWEETENED SOFT DRINKS:

The taste may differ, but don't kid yourself they're actually a bit healthier

BY ROSIE MESTEL
Los Angeles Times

Given all the panic in the streets about high-fructose corn syrup, it's no surprise that beverage companies are making hay out of vintage formulations that use sugar from cane or beets in their beverages instead of the syrup. Many fans say the beverages taste better with sucrose — hence the following enjoyed by Mexican Coke.

It is also not surprising that the Sugar Association is thrilled by this development. In an exuberant press release last week it "applauded Pepsi-Cola" for reintroducing Pepsi Throwback (For a limited time only! Hurry! Hurry!) and noted that "Pepsi Throw-



See SODA on Page E4

Oh, how I long for a universal handyman

Used to be one handyman could fix everything: blown pipes, cold ovens, fallen fences, busted windows. Not anymore. Today every home ailment has a specialist. Last week, my house needed four: a drain guy (don't confuse him with a plumber), a refrigerator repairman, a heater expert, and my husband.

So began the handyman parade. The drain guy cleared the pasta jam. When I asked if he could also fix the kitchen faucet, which had come loose from the counter it was supposed to be stuck to, he said, "Sorry that requires a plumber's tool. I'm a drain expert!" Silly me. I didn't dare ask him to look at the refrigerator, which had started making a noise like a helicopter.

Instead, I called the refrigerator repair company: "When the motor kicks in, the fridge makes this noise I have to shout over. This only happens when I'm talking, which, despite what my family thinks, isn't funny!"

AT HOME



BY MARNI JAMESON

Next, the door handle broke. We couldn't open the most used door in the house, the one adjoining the mudroom to the garage, a port of entry busier than Ellis Island in 1907. Dan removed the lever handle and screwed it back on, hard. It worked for 10 minutes, then broke again. Frustrated, I grabbed my pink and purple tool kit and stripped the screw.

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Green

fewer repairs means less rebuilding, less materials, less waste and less burden on the environment.

LANDSCAPE

In lieu of a lush lawn, which requires mowing, thus burning fuel, the Uzelac's yard will be filled with native species of plants that require less water and maintenance. The concept is called xeriscaping, which originated in Colorado.

HEATING AND COOLING

On a computer-generated model, Nenad describes

the cornerstone and proudest feature of the green home – its passive solar windows.

The position of the sun throughout the year has dictated the orientation of the house, so the sun can reduce the load on the energy-efficient furnace. Of course, since a leaky house would reduce the benefit of the windows, Nenad is also a stickler for tight insulation, as the builder knows.

PLUMBING

Nenad says the home's durable PEX plumbing system will require less maintenance because all the lines are attached to one big manifold in which every sink has its own line. In an

effort not to break the bank, but building in opportunities to keep greening up the home in the future, the home will have provisions for a solar water heater which can be installed on the roof down the road.

ELECTRICITY

Leaving the lights on in unoccupied spaces is a common energy waster. Nenad proudly shows off the remote control lighting system he is already using in their current home.

MORE FEASIBLE THAN ONE MIGHT THINK

All in all, Nenad says building a home in a more eco-friendly way is not as out of reach as one might think. He estimates they will pay five or 10 percent more for the home when all is said and done, mostly for the windows and insulation.

But he says some green practices can be a part of any budget. "If you're building from scratch, then it is worthwhile looking into the existing plans because the plan may be three to five percent more expensive than conventional building, but it's something that with cash flow, you can justify."

Nenad advises visiting NAHBGREEN.ORG and downloading the standards for green building. Find something that fits in your budget and talk to the builder about it.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1

Soda

back gives shoppers another opportunity to choose natural sweeteners instead of manufactured ones."

Certainly, cane/beet sugar – once reviled – has had a rehabilitation in the last year or so, with a lot of new products touting its inclusion, to the point that you might think it was a health food.

Never mind that sugar – sucrose – is made up of one unit of fructose and one unit of glucose, to which it is broken down when it enters the body. High fructose corn syrup is made up of very similar proportions of fructose and glucose (55 percent and 45 percent) – the main difference being that the fructose and glucose are already detached in the syrup.

By virtue of the way they bind and detach to the receptors in our mouths, different sugars can indeed taste distinct from one another (and so can artificial sweeteners). Fructose reportedly tastes sweeter than sucrose, so you might imagine that HFCS-sweetened drinks could taste different in the mouth. There are also recent reports that overconsumption of fructose in particular may induce metabolic changes that raise the risk for diabetes and heart disease.

But again – since the fructose levels in high fructose corn syrup and sucrose are so similar, there's not much reason to suppose that Pepsi Throwback and other "natural sugar" drinks are any healthier.

You can read an article about HFCS's fall from grace – "Dark Sugar: The Decline and Fall of High-Fructose Corn Syrup" by Daniel Engber – at SLATE.COM.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1

At Home

Using a special drill bit, Dan extracted the stripped screw like a bad molar, got the handle off, and put a new one on. (You can tell him the lever part is upside down.) Right then the various parts of the house got together and decided it would be funny if the heater blew.

And so, like millions of heaters across North America working overtime last week during the record-breaking cold, ours croaked. We went to bed, turned the heat down to 63, which I firmly believe prevents wrinkles, and woke up in the Tundra.

Of all our house breakdowns this past week, the heater was the most inconvenient. Because winter is

far from over, and even folks in Florida are freezing, I'm passing along this advice from heater hero Don Turner, a 20-year veteran of Steel-T Heating, in Englewood, Colo:

DON'T GET LEFT IN THE COLD. If your heater breaks during a cold spell, call help right away. The sooner you call, the less you'll wait.

During this last cold spell, heating service companies reported a 40 to 60 percent spike in calls more than normal winter weeks.

WHY ON THE COLDEST DAY? Heaters do break more often when temperatures are coldest, just as air conditioners break more on hottest days, because we ask more of them.

WHAT BREAKS? The most common heater repairs are burned out igniters (our problem), and broken blower motors. Igniters burn out just like light bulbs.

YOU CAN'T DO MUCH TO

PROLONG THEIR LIVES. However, you can lengthen the life of your blower motor by having your heater serviced and cleaned annually.

CLEAN YOUR AIR VENTS. Whether your filters are disposable or reusable, Turner recommends replacing or cleaning them monthly; other experts say annually.

CLEAN FILTERS PROVIDE THE BEST AIR FLOW. Dirty ones make equipment work harder.

USE CAUTION. If you check the unit yourself, turn the power off before removing panels or using tools. Wear a mask. Check inside for dirt or clogs in the system.

TEST FOR POISONOUS GAS. Ask your technician to check your heater's carbon monoxide level. Many carry a gadget that detects carbon monoxide coming out your vents. Zero parts per million is best. Five to nine is acceptable. Over nine, shut down the unit.

KEEP AN ELECTRIC SPACE HEATER HANDY. You'll want the backup to get you through until help arrives.

Marni Jameson is a humorous syndicated home-design columnist, speaker and author of "The House Always Wins" (DaCapo/Perseus), now in paperback and of the forthcoming "House of Havoc" (due from DaCapo in February). Reach her at marnijameson.com.

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- IT'S COMPLICATED (R) 12:50 (3:50) 6:45 9:45
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